Kennedy

San Francisco Examiner Jan 26

Plot theory rejected

How FBI considered plants to cast doubt on Coretta King

WASHINGTON (UPI) — After James Earl Ray's conviction for the murder of Martin Luther King Jr., FBI leaders considered planting a news story and having a book written to discredit King's widow and other conspiracy theorists, newly released FBI files disclosed.

But the King assassination files also show the FBI was still checking out its own conspiracy tips as late as December 1976, when it dismissed a "tip" that King's successor as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, had taken out a $265,000 "hit" contract on their leader.

Insights into the bureau's suspicion of Mrs. King and her husband's followers — whom it apparently wiretapped even after his murder — emerged from more than 40,000 pages of investigative files released under the Freedom of Information act.

Files reviewed earlier showed the FBI concluded Ray acted without conspirators, a belief questioned by Mrs. King and many others.

The FBI leadership's hostility toward conspiracy theorists, and King's intimates in particular, is set forth in a series of memos written to J. Edgar Hoover by his aide, Cartha DeLoach, starting on March 11, 1969.

That was two days after Ray pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 99 years in prison for shooting King to death in Memphis on April 4, 1968.

"Now that Ray has been convicted," DeLoach wrote, "I would like to suggest that the director allow us to choose a friendly, capable author, or the Readers Digest, and proceed with a book based on the case."

In the memo signed off with Hoover's "O.K.," DeLoach suggested such a book would polish the FBI's image while preserving "the true history of this case" against the attacks of conspiracy theorists.

Then he proposed attacking Mrs. King and Abernathy through a planted news story.

"I would also like to suggest . . . advising a friendly newspaper contact, on a strictly confidential basis, that Coretta King and Rev. Abernathy are deliberately plotting to keep King's assassination in the news by pulling the ruse of maintaining that King's murder was definitely a conspiracy.

"This, of course, is obviously a rank trick in order to keep the money coming to Mrs. King, Abernathy and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference," DeLoach said. "We can do this without any attribution to the FBI and without anyone knowing that the information came from a wiretap."

The files disclosed nothing more about the wiretaps, nor do they show whether the book or the news article projects were ever carried out.

Investigation of the hit-contract allegation about Abernathy was reported in a memo dated Dec. 15, 1976, from the FBI's Birmingham bureau to Washington headquarters.

It said agents had just spent several weeks checking a tip that Abernathy and an SCLC colleague identified only as the Rev. Shuttleworth "had bought a contract for $265,000 to have Martin Luther King killed."

The rumored motive, they said, was the underlings' belief that "King had gone soft with his nonviolence and the money coming into SCLC and the civil rights movement had fallen off considerably . . . if he were killed he would become a martyr and money would be flowing in."

The reporting agents said the tip came from an unidentified informant who got his information from a man who allegedly showed him a rifle two weeks before the Memphis killing and said, "This will be used to kill Martin Luther King."

For whom the Bell tolls

BATON ROUGE, La. — A request to increase Louisiana's nickel pay phones to 20 cents has been submitted to the state's Public Service Commission. Louisiana is one of only a handful of places in the United States where a pay phone costs only five cents.